

Message Text

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PAGE 01 DAMASC 01037 151606Z
ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1768

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

DIA WASHDC

USCINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 1037

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS SY

SUBJECT: GROWING STATURE OF NAJI JAMIL EXCITES SOME CONCERN
WITHIN SARG

REF: USDAO IR 6 891 0061 77 (NOTAL)

1. FOLLOWING SHOULD BE READ IN CONJUNCTION WITH REFTEL WHICH
REPORTED POSSIBLE CHANGES IN SYRIAN AF SENIOR COMMAND, IN-
CLUDING SELECTION OF AF COMMANDER NAJI JAMIL AS NEW PRIMIN.

2. BRITISH EMBOFF LEARNED FROM "GOOD SOURCE" THAT AIR FORCE
SENIOR COMMAND MET WEEKEND OF JAN 22-23 TO DISCUSS FUTURE
OF AF COMMANDER NAJI JAMIL. EMBOFF SAID THAT OFFICERS, MOST
OF WHOM WERE ALAWITES, EXPRESSED GROWING CONCERN OVER INCREASING
POWER OF JAMIL (A SUNNI) AND WANTED TO PLACE SOME RESTRICTIONS ON HIS
INFLUENCE. EMBOFF SAID THAT PRIOR TO MEETING THERE WAS GENERAL
FEELING THAT JAMIL SHOULD BE SLOTTED INTO PRIME MINISTERSHIP
AS MEANS OF CURBING HIS POWER, BUT HE DID NOT KNOW WHETHER
GROUP REACHED ANY DECISION OR CONSENSUS ON IT.

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PAGE 02 DAMASC 01037 151606Z

3. COMMENT: ROLE OF NAJI JAMIL IN SARG HAS FLUCTUATED OVER
PAST TWO YEARS. AT 1975 BAATH PARTY REGIONAL PARTY CONGRESS,
COALITION LED BY RIF'AT AL-ASAD UNSEATED JAMIL FROM REGIONAL
COMMAND (ALONG WITH THEN PRIMIN MAHMUD AYYUBI). PRES ASAD,
HOWEVER, HELPED ENGINEER ELECTION OF JAMIL (AND AYYUBI) TO
PARTY'S NATIONAL COMMAND AT NATIONAL CONGRESS IN SUMMER OF

1975. AS LEBANESE SITUATION GRADUALLY DETERIORATED, ASAD TURNED TO JAMIL (AMONG OTHER SENIOR OFFICERS) TO ASSIST IN SYRIAN EFFORTS TO RESTORE ORDER. AS SYRIAN INVOLVEMENT IN LEBANON GREW, AND LOCAL OPPOSITION TO SYRIA'S CONFRONTATION WITH PLO AND LEBANESE LEFTISTS ESCALATED, JAMIL'S ROLE AS OVERALL COORDINATOR OF SYRIAN SECURITY AGENCIES BECAME STEADILY MORE IMPORTANT.

4. ALTHOUGH SYRIAN MEDIA CARRIED PHOTO OF JAMIL AND RIF'AT TOGETHER ON EVE OF PRESIDENT'S JOURNEY TO PARIS IN JUNE 1976, THEIR "RECONCILIATION" WAS SHORT-LIVED, EFFECTED PRIMARILY TO DEMONSTRATE THAT COMPETING ELEMENTS IN REGIME HAD CLOSED RANKS IN FACE OF LEBANESE DIFFICULTIES AND THREAT OF IRAQI TROOPS ON SYRIAN BORDER. BY LATE DECEMBER, TENSIONS ON REGIONAL COMMAND BETWEEN RIF'AT AND SUNNI FACTION REPORTEDLY SUPPORTED BY JAMIL HAD DISRUPTED ABILITY OF RC MEMBERS TO CARRY OUT THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES, AND PRES ASAD IN LENGTHY SESSION WITH RC AGREED TO TRIM HIS BROTHER'S POWER.

5. JAMIL HAS BEEN ONE OF ASAD'S OLDEST AND CLOSEST ALLIES; WE HAVE NO INFORMATION SUGGESTING HIS LOYALTY TO PRESIDENT UNDER QUESTION. RATHER, EFFORTS TO CURB HIS POWER SEEM ALMOST NATURAL DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE COALITION OF MILITARY/ SECURITY OFFICERS WHO JEALOUS OF THEIR PREROGATIVES IN REGIM'S INNER COUNCILS. AS AF COMMANDER AND NATIONAL SECURITY COORDINATOR, JAMIL'S INCREASING POWER AND HIS WILLINGNESS TO EXERCISE IT MAY SEEM TO SOME OF HIS COLLEAGUES AS SELF-AGGRANDIZEMENT POTENTIALLY AT THEIR OWN EXPENSE. HOWEVER, EFFORT TO PLACE JAMIL IN PRIME MINISTERSHIP SEEMS UNLIKELY TO
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 DAMASC 01037 151606Z

OFFER ANY EARLY SOLUTION THEIR CONCERNS. FROM COMMENTS OF MURPHY HIS CABINET COLLEAGUES AND ON BASIS AMBASSADOR'S RECENT MEETING WITH HIM, PRIMIN KHULAYFAWI APPEARS TO HAVE REGAINED HIS ENTHUSIASM FOR THE JOB AND ASSUMING CONTINUED STRONG BACKING BY ASAD, WE BELIEVE HE WILL BE STAYING ON FOR FORESEABLE FUTURE.
MURPHY

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Disposition Approved on Date:
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